A Proposed Synopsis
On Shaping Narratives: The Shifting Paradigms of Women's Representations in 21st Century Bollywood

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A Proposed Short Synopsis for the Award of Ph.D in English (Humanities)

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Shaping Narratives: The Shifting Paradigms of Women's Representation in 21st Century Bollywood

Women are portrayed in a variety of roles beyond just love interests or damsel in distress, including professionals, athletes, and leaders. This can be seen on the celluloid too as, there has been a surge in the making of female-centric films that focuses on women's stories, struggles, and achievements, breaking away from the male-dominated narra ve. More women are entering the filmmaking industry as directors, writers, and producers, bringing their unique perspec ves and stories to the screen. While there is s ll progress to be made, Hindi cinema in the 21st century delves into the women's issues prevalent in Indian society. Bollywood has started challenging tradi onal gender stereotypes, showcasing women who defy societal norms and expecta ons. The proposed research seeks to study the women's representa on in Hindi movies in the 21st century.

The theories taken for study:

Representa on theory in media refers to how various aspects such as gender, age, ethnicity, na onal and regional iden es, social issues, and events are depicted and portrayed to the audience.

Framing theory provides insight into how individuals construct and interpret reality through language within social interac ons.

Male Gaze theory by Laura Mulvey delves into the portrayal of female characters in media par cularly film as passive objects of male desire.

Fat Shaming theory deals with the societal phenomenon of s gma zing and discrimina ng against individuals who are overweight or obese.

Signature of Research Supervisor Signature of Research Scholar

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Introduction

"It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of a woman is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing."

-Swami Vivekananda

The way women are depicted in Hindi movies, also known as Bollywood films, showcases the changing social, cultural, and ideological environments of India throughout the history of Indian cinema up until today. The representation of women has undergone a significant transformation, mirroring shifts in societal norms gender dynamics, and women's roles in Indian society. At its inception Hindi Cinema primarily featured women in stereotypical roles portraying them as obedient daughters devoted wives of helpless damsels in distress these portrayals often perpetuated traditional gender norms and reinforced patriarchal ideologies prevalent in Indian society. However, as Indian society progressed and underwent profound socio-cultural changes so did the portrayal of women in Bollywood films. With the rise of feminism and the women's rights movements, Hindi cinema began to explore more nuanced and complex representations of women female characters evolved from passive recipients of male heroism to active agents in their narratives challenging stereotypes and asserting their agency. Today Hindi movies showcase a diverse range of female characters from strong and independent protagonists to complex and flawed individuals. Women are depicted as professionals, leaders, rebels, and survivors grappling with issues such as gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and societal expectations.
While stereotypes and regressive representations persist in some Bollywood films.
There is a growing trend towards a more progressive and empowering portrayal of women. Female characters are increasingly portrayed as multifaceted individuals with their aspirations, struggles, and triumphs contributing to a more inclusive and representative cinematic landscape in India.

Literature Review

In her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey argues that patriarchal cultures display women as symbols of the primary presence, confined by symbolic explanations. Mulvey creates masculine gaze theory, which is implemented in film. This gaze, protected by cinematic quotes, creates a universe and object that satisfies the audience's idealised view of women in film. Cinema has become a tool for promoting gender roles and relationships in society. “Self-objectification and Male Gaze in Lipstick Advertising” by Li Sufangfei and Ziruo Xie explore how her lipstick ad and other beauty and fashion ads shame women and empower men. Kelly Oliver in "The male gaze is more relevant and more dangerous than ever," argues that viewers empathise with the aggressive male protagonist while female characters are passive objects of desire. Oliver emphasises that the lopsided power dynamic in these films, where all agents and identities are male, inhibits women's agency and personhood. "Lady in Red: Framing the Representations of Women” through mise-en-scene by Napal Raungnapakul and Norsiah Abdul Hamid argues that red is used in films to signify confidence, non-innocence, and high sexual attractiveness in female protagonists. It is also used to reflect men's desire and serve as an epitome of female protagonist lust and power. Renita Coleman's "Framing the picture in our head: investigating the framing and agenda setting influence of visual image" examines how visual images shape new framing in visual studies. Coleman describes editing and angle choosing in picture advertising and movie framing to pick what to show and how. According to Coleman, women on television gain attention primarily on sexual material status and children's appearance rather than identity. "Changing trends in the portrayal of women in Hindi cinema: A historical study" by Pooja Gupta shows how women have changed with the country's political and social changes. She promoted women's esteem and liberation through this. Before post-independence, films showed strong women leading, but none were sought.

Films of the time show how cosmetic waves in India affected a generation. When actresses started using heavy eye makeup and had their attire and looks scrutinised. After 1950, Hindi cinema has seen women who wear embellished and manicured, but cameras have also objectified women by focusing on their bodies, luxury outfits, and blow-dried hair.

Research Methodology

This proposed research analyses the films on women's representation in Hindi movies like Mardaani, English Vinglish, Queen, Thappad, Lipstick under my Burkha, etc. This paper will analyse how, women are portrayed as objects. It will discuss how these representations directly affect women of all ages and indirectly affect society or the globe. It will be using the representation theory, male gaze theory, fat shaming, and media framing theory.

Representation in media refers to how various aspects such as gender, age, ethnicity, national and regional identity, social issues, and events are depicted and portrayed to the audience. Media texts wield significant influence in shaping the audience's perceptions, beliefs, and understanding of these topics. Through storytelling, visuals, and messaging, media can either reinforce stereotypes and biases or challenge them, contributing to the audience's knowledge and comprehension of societal issues and identities. Therefore, the way these elements are presented in media texts holds the power to shape societal norms, attitudes, and behaviours.

Framing Theory provides insight into how individuals construct and interpret reality through language within social interactions. In essence, it suggests that our understanding of the world is shaped by the way information is presented to us, or framed, in various contexts. These frames, or interpretive lenses, not only infuence how we perceive events and issues but also contribute to the construction of identities within social interactions.

The concept of the male gaze, as articulated by Laura Mulvey, delves into the portrayal of female characters in media, particularly film, as passive objects of male desire. It extends beyond mere representation to encompass the power dynamics inherent in how women are depicted and perceived. The male gaze not only influences the perceptions of male audiences but also impacts how women view themselves and their place in society. When women are constantly subjected to images and narratives that reduce them to objects of male desire, it can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, objectification, and internalized misogyny.

Fat shaming theory deals with the societal phenomenon of stigmatizing and discriminating against individuals who are overweight or obese. It explores how cultural norms, media representations, and interpersonal interactions contribute to the marginalization of people based on their body size. Media often perpetuate narrow beauty standards by promoting thinness as the ideal body type, leading to the stigmatization of larger bodies.

Research Hypothesis

In the 21st century, Bollywood cinema has witnessed new trends, one of which is the emergence of women-centric films. These films portray women who rebel against conservative society and raise their voices against inequality. As part of my research, I aim to highlight the significant gender disparity in terms of screen time, characters' complexity, and portrayal of women compared to men in Hindi cinema.

Research Objectives

- To examine the women's status in the industries and how they are used as an object
- To analyse the impact of female representations in Hindi movies and audience perceptions and attitudes toward gender roles
- To explore the agency and empowerment of female characters in Hindi cinema
- To examine how representations of Hindi movies intersect with identities such as class, caste, religion, and sexuality

Research Coverage

The proposed research will deal with women-centric films like Thappad, Mardaani, Dangal, etc. released in the 21st century through the theory of Representation, fat shaming, Male Gaze, media framing, etc.

Work Design

The proposed research is planned for the following tentative chapters:

1. Chapter One: Introduction
2. Chapter Two: Fashion and Objectification: Empowering Women's Narratives
3. Chapter Three: Advocating for Reproductive Health and Rights
4. Chapter Four: Redefining Body Size: Deconstructing Fat Shaming Culture

5. Chapter Five: From Victim to Survivor: Prostitution and Trafficking of Girls 6. Chapter Six: Conclusion

Conclusion

The representation of women in cinema has undergone a significant transformation, mirroring shifts in societal norms gender dynamics and women's role in Indian society. Hindi cinema has started to delve into the intersectional identities though the development is gradual. Thus there is a perpetual need for constant efforts to shackle the stereotype promoting inclusivity and empowering women both in reel and real lives, ensuring that the industry remains relevant in the shifting or evolving main stream society.

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